

*With affectionate regards
From W. D. Moss*

A Tragedy of Speed

Sermon on the

Wreck of the Titanic

by Reverend William D. Moss

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PSALM XXIX:3.

"The Voice of the Lord is upon the waters."

On Monday morning of the past week the startling news was borne to us that the largest and best equipped vessel of the ocean had foundered in the northern waters. Shortly before midnight of that same day we read with sorrow unspeakable that the steamship Titanic had sunk and that with her more than a thousand lives had perished. Even so—

"The moving finger writes, and having writ,
Moves on; nor all your piety nor wit
Can lure it back to cancel half a line,
Nor all your tears wash out a word of it."

The impossible sometimes happens in this strange world. The impossible has happened in this untimely event, and we are trying in our dazed state to make the readjustment. We shall go forward after these first hours of grief. But the survivors of that wreck and those belonging to them shall find life a

different thing henceforth; and no serious individual can possibly have known of this dark deed of the sea and take up his life again as though the hand of restraining Grace had not been laid upon it.

We have been busy attaching blame. Today even the Christian pulpit may be tempted to raise the voice of denunciation as it brings its message to stricken lives and darkened homes. But this is an hour for penitence and prayer, for pity and sympathy and not for denunciation. And may God lend us Grace as we press forward with our thought and speech.

Blame is always the easy thing. It is easy today, for someone has blundered. But if our business were to blame, whom should we arraign?

Should it be the builders of that ship that sank? We feel sure that to their task they brought sincerity and a cunning skill, and that they wrought to give to the seas a vessel worthy in strength and comfort and speed. Had they neglected their task, however, and sent forth an unworthy product from their hands their sin had not been an isolated sin to be tabulated and understood and denounced apart from its economic environment.

Should we arraign an Old World government because of its lax laws for ships freighted with the sacred cargo of human souls? Governments are entrusted with the care of the people, and governments are often careless. The Slocum disaster at our own doors—in which many lives perished because of worthless life preservers and the greed of a corporation that permitted on a vessel more passengers than were safe—was a criminal miscarriage of legislation. Men were punished for that crime, but they were not punished whose business it was to make and enforce laws for public protection.

A government is guilty when it permits a corpora-

tion to launch a ship that in time of peril has provision for but a third of its full list of passengers. Tennis courts and bowling alleys and swimming pools are luxuries to be provided only after public safety has been secured. And where lifeboats were wanting—no matter what areas were reserved for ease and enjoyment—there was a menace to human life that called for the restraining hand of law.

It mattered not in the old Roman days that the people were given the pleasures of the arena and gratuitously provided with food. For in those days human life was an unsafe and fearsome thing. The Roman would have fared better with fewer displays in the arena and a sweeter daily promise of life; fewer statues in his public squares and buildings and the happy sense of freedom as he walked abroad.

And, as in the days and upon the streets of ancient Rome, so, yonder, on the high seas—where fair women and brave men perished needlessly—a tragedy of death and mangled forms and sorrow-stricken lives had its prelude in inefficient legislation. It was a pardonable inefficiency. For the modern steamship is practically the conqueror of the deep. That government is to blame, however, that—knowing the modern thirst for speed—it did not guard against even the semblance of risk. But the statute-book is not an isolated thing. We must go back of it to interpret its faults.

Should we denounce the corporations that vie with each other for the supremacy of the ocean, and to whom—it would seem—human life is cheap compared with speed and the emoluments of the fastest steamship service? The mania of self-confidence is upon the owners of the great ocean liners; and the mania of self-confidence has its sequel in the mania of speed.

In ancient days they sought to build a high tower reaching to the skies, that should successfully withstand all danger of storm and flood. The twentieth century steamship is the modern equivalent of the Tower of Babel. For, in her strength and mechanical skill, she defies the elements, and within her hospitable area promises to seafaring folk immunity from the perils of the deep. Need we wonder, then, that the corporation, overconfident in its provision against wind and wave, should make speed even when warning of danger had gone before? Let us grant that this vessel, gone to her doom, was not built to be a miracle of speed; that on her maiden voyage she was not seeking to make a record. Yet the contagion of speed was upon her, for she was almost at her speed limit in a dangerous region, of which her officers had been warned. How far the steamship company was responsible for such reckless seamanship we may not know. The sins of a corporation, however, are not solitary sins; and it is a superficial thing to denounce the corporation and forget that it is but a part of the social organism—a large and vigorous part, 'tis true, but only a part. We need not minimize the wrongs of corporate industry, whether its business be of the sea or land. The corporation, however, is a result as well as a cause, the product as well as the source of social mischief.

Should we inveigh against the President of that steamship company, who sat proudly in his floating palace, in the radiant hope that his business rivals should be made his footstool; in the sweet joy of that promised success that was to give his corporation a name above every name in the annals of the sea? Was not his hope or his joy a pardonable thing in an age when competition is still the manner of business, when

fraternal industry is but an unrealized ideal and the Sermon on the Mount is not supposed to be applied to the transactions of the market place? Is it asked why he should have entered a lifeboat and thus sought his safety while others remained with the sinking ship? Let us remember that it is possible for any man to lose his self-control when the crisis is upon him; and is that not always a spectacle for pity rather than scorn, for mercy rather than judgment?

We wonder that, knowing the danger before him the Captain of that ill-fated vessel did not make his way cautiously among the ice floes and icebergs. It is said that this was to be his last voyage as a servant of the steamship company, that on his return home he was to retire from active life. His record was already made, and he could scarcely have been ambitious for further laurels. His programme, therefore, in that dangerous region can be understood only when we reflect that he had caught the universal contagion of speed.

The wreck of the Titanic is not an isolated tragedy. It is the tragedy of the centuries renewing itself. It is but one loud sob amidst the sobs of the toiling years. It is but one wail of the whole creation that groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. As such it is a tragedy not merely of the ocean, but of the daily life of men and women upon land. The age in which we live is focussed in this calamity. You and I are bound up in this drama of the sea. At half past eleven of the clock, Sunday night, when the Titanic stopped and staggered and hastened to her doom, there happened, in concrete and lurid manner, what is taking place in daily life around us. If we have had eyes to behold it, we must have seen in this tragedy of the

ocean our own daily habit of life written large.

Ours is an age of individualism, which implies that it is an age of self-interest, which further implies that it is an age of competition, which is another way of saying that it is an age of speed. And speed always has its danger—danger to the man who makes the speed and to those associated with him. There is but one of two ways for human beings to live in this world—the way of individualism or the way of communal responsibility, the way of self-interest or the way of self-sacrifice, the way of competition or the way of co-operation, the way of speed or the way of restraint. And yonder where the ruthless deep yawned to receive its unwilling and innocent victims the law of life exercised its ancient prerogative, that what soever a man soweth that shall he also reap. Where individualism, where self-interest, where competition, where speed abounds, tragedy is naturally and inevitably in sight—even if the tragedy be delayed. And the sorrow's crown of sorrow in the tragedy, when it comes, is that the innocent always suffer and the guilty sometimes escape.

A government is making speed and not taking time to think carefully of public welfare when it makes laws permitting vessels to sail the high seas with a limited lifeboat service. A corporation is making speed and not taking time to think of its duties as well as its rights when it is content simply to comply with the statute-book and be within the pale of legal but not of moral rectitude. An age, such as ours, is making speed and thinking less of the value of human life than of its industrial achievement when it puts a premium on money or luxury or success or display rather than on the things that make for righteousness and peace

and the hope that is not ashamed. And in the tragedy of this hour we have witnessed the wrong-doing not of one man or a body of men, but of the age. The sins of a government are the sins of its people brought to a focus. The sins of our corporations are our own sins made palpable. The corporation reflects the national habit of life. In an age and country where the people have ideals, corporate industry assumes the virtuous, even if it has it not. But where such industry is careful merely to make speed and thinks only of its deals, we may rest assured that the people are perishing with lack of moral vision.

And the fact is driven home to us today that as an age, as a nation and as individuals, we lack moral vision. We worship success. We worship money. We worship luxury. We worship display. We worship the material. We worship the ephemeral. We worship self-interest. We worship competition. In other words, we worship speed. For the faster we hurry along, placing distance between us and our rivals in the competitive race of life, the faster do we realize our self-interest. And so this tragedy of the ocean has its daily counterpart on the land.

The nation that makes laws for the few and the strong, and renders it difficult for the individual to prosper; that devotes money to erect statues in its public parks and fights a bill to provide for a young girl permanently injured in the government service and through the careless oversight of a Department of Labor there; that spends money lavishly on its office buildings and niggardly on its employees; that winks at corporate wrong and swiftly punishes the individual who is guilty of trivial offense, but without political influence—that nation is a Titan making

speed, but making also for its dissolution.

The statesman who wants to make a record, and who seeks to increase his speed over his fellows in the race for wealth or position or power; who therefore votes at the dictation of the Lobbyist and so betrays his sacred trust as a representative of the people, repeats in brutal fashion on shore this recent horror of the deep. And he is a statesman in name, but a politician and parasite in practice.

The newspaper that for additional advertisements suppresses facts that should be made public; that, in order to increase its speed in the rivalry for money, publishes sensational and hurtful things, is doing on land what the Titanic did at sea. In connection with this disaster and in flaming headlines the daily press is proclaiming a righteous indignation today against corporate industry. But, knowing, as we do, the business ideals of the press, we must feel that in this hour it is drawing attention to the mote in its brother's eye while the huge beam swings unheeded in its own.

The member of an industrial corporation who works there merely to advance special interests, forgetting the duties and remembering only the rights of industry, shirking industrial responsibility while he makes industrial speed, is a menace to human life similar to that menace turned into a horror when the Titanic plunged beneath the waves.

The government official, placed at the head of a division or department, who sets himself to make speed and win a record, working his clerks unmercifully or making it difficult for them to hold their positions, even throwing obstacles in the way of a woman obliged to earn her bread, is an individualist on land doing a tragic business similar to that of the ill-fated ship that

made speed to the destruction and sorrow of human life.

The minister of religion who thinks more of numbers than of individual souls, who makes speed to add names to a church register, caring less that they also be written in the Lamb's Book of Life; anxious that respectable dividends be chronicled in his yearly report and caring less how those dividends are raised or to what object they are contributed; content when the wheels of ecclesiastical machinery go smoothly round, even if tradition usurps the place of truth in his preaching and unrebuked selfishness usurps the place of the Cross in homes and hearts under his care; who is ambitious merely for his own church or denomination and hesitates not to have his success through the depletion of other religious institutions about him—that man is an individualist who also claims that he has looked upon Calvary! And he is the land equivalent in daily life of this tragedy of the ocean.

The writer of a book who thinks of his receipts rather than his message, who writes merely to please when he could write to inspire and help; who might be a literary prophet, but is a literary hack or slave or charlatan—is another Titanic on land in whose keeping our lives, aspiring for protection and guidance, are unsafe. He is making speed, and the souls he carries with him on his way suffer in consequence.

The woman who lives for her club and neglects her home, for her social engagements rather than her children, for her daily pleasure rather than her duty, for her social prestige rather than social service—is a Titanic tragedy by land, making speed, but spreading destruction and desolation on her way.

The parents who raise their boys with the aspiration

for states and without the ideas that go with self-sacrifice, who bring up their daughters to make a matchless marriage and fail to foster their hearts in the lessons of pity and reverence and self-forgetfulness of sincerity and simplicity and sweet innocence are a Titanic tragedy of early life, sad as it is pathetic and wicked as it is prevalent.

These far-off islands I am now visiting lack the sense of community and unity in so far as we think

of ourselves and regard not the rights of others. So far as we make speed on distant oceanic routes and get out of the way of sacrifice, so far as we go for our own convenience or comfort, I hear in the voice of a vast, solemn loneliness the cry from the high seas.

The voice of the land comes from the ocean and in warning comes telling of the tragedy of speed. We are warned again that we should not rush through the calamity and sorrow of the earth. It is this, and so runs the law of life that the earth is covered far and through with human sacrifice. It is this, that we may avoid and we must not avoid, that the law of sacrifice may come after us may also abound.

The voice of the Lord is upon the waters, saying that in a speed race with danger as a human fire, a vast and civilized world go to destruction or keep step with the slowest of foot and feeblest of hand and that business and learning and gentleness as well as the science of success.

It is customary these days to look upon the nations of the world and to say that modern civilization is better than the old. But there is this one thing, that the old is better than the new.

interest and speed their law of life. Individualism was their national policy. In our day and generation, however, individualism lifts up its head only against earnest and hopeful protest. Yes, hopeful protest. For through all modern civilization, with its marks of selfishness upon it, and especially through our own, there is spreading the leaven of corporate responsibility. We are on our way, in other words, not to destruction, but to triumph. This American Commonwealth—the modern Titan—bearing along its millions of souls, is among the ice floes and icebergs. But we are slackening our speed and looking calmly toward the open waters where we shall have free course and be glorified. We are a nation of idealists, even if the mania of competition and speed is upon us. The Cross lifts up its masterful countenance among us even if the law of self-interest is honored and obeyed. There are men and women ready to wear their crowns of thorns for the sake of an ideal, if many are reaching out breathlessly for the crown of gold!

It is thrilling to realize that in that dark hour, when individualism found its sequel in tragedy, when speed turned into destruction, and men and women were hurled to their doom, there were those who had vision of the Cross and laid down their lives that others might live; there were those who slackened their speed for the sake of the slower of step and weaker of limb.

Women sacrificed for each other. We have record of a young woman who resigned her place in the lifeboat that a mother might be spared to her home.

Women clung to their husbands and coveted death rather than be parted from them. And have they not told us, in that devotion, that there is such a thing as pure, disinterested, lofty, sacred affection, and that

the modern home, so often sullied by strife and divorce, is not without its fires of consecration?

There were men known to us—and many unknown—who helped the women and children to the place of safety while they themselves were hastening to their doom. A sailor, asked why he had not on a life preserver, replied that he did not think there were sufficient to go round. All hail thou Son of Calvary!

Colonel Astor might have been pardoned had he entered the lifeboat. For his wife sorely needed his ministrations in that hour. But with special claims of marital responsibility upon him, he kissed her farewell. A spectacle of heroism to angels and to men!

A young lad, but fourteen years of age, refused to be parted from his father, who remained with the ship. It was only when thrust into the lifeboat that he accepted his deliverance. "Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven."

The Captain of that vessel refused to live even after his life might have been spared with honor. For he was rescued from the sea and had opportunity of survival. But thrusting his life preserver from him, he cast himself into the deep to be comrade to those who perished by his side.

A recent writer has said that you have never heard of an artist arraigned before a court of justice. Be that as it may. Art, we know, is not for art's sake, but for a message. The artist is a man of ideals. Art is ethical or it is nothing. And the artist Millet, of this city, perished yonder, seeking not his own life, but the lives of others. That lover of beauty died with the Beauty of Holiness in his heart and upon his countenance.

As became the hero, Mr. Clarence Moore, also of

this city, bowed submissively to the call of the Cross.

Major Archibald Butt will abide in our memory as one of the heroes of the centuries. No one has ever done a braver deed than he or done it more calmly, more beautifully. In his busy life among us he was often known to steal away to the early morning communion of his church. But,

"The Holy Supper is kept indeed
In whatso we share with another's need;"

and the Titanic disaster gave to him the opportunity which he accepted to take the sacrament of personal vicarious sacrifice. Yonder he stands, guarding the lifeboats that women and children and others might be saved, smiling to one he had known in former days in the service of the White House as he performed the last offices of comfort for her on her way to rescue. Yonder we see him at the close of the busy, tragic hours, a Sir Galahad of modern life, looking over the deep as the vessel fills and sinks, calmly going to his death as a soldier and a man.

"Thou just and faithful Knight of God,
Ride on, the prize is near."

Such are the nation's wealth and hope and dream. We are better that we have looked into the faces of some of them, that we have lived in the city that owned them, and that we partake with them of a common humanity. They are greater in their death than in their life. For, as Jesus died and rose again, and by the Cross human life has been replenished, so all such in their dying sow the seed that shall spring

up into a bountiful harvest of consecration, And in their death they themselves have vanished into light. For our God has whispered to us in the radiant Gospel of His Son that the man who gives up his life for others has vision and experience of Calvary. And for him the exultant message runs:

"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

"Content, then, whosoe'er, whose day is done,
There lies not any troublous thing before;
Nor sight, nor sound, to war against thee more;
For whom all winds are quiet as the sun,
All oceans as the shore."